

Nearer Home. BY FRANK CARL. One sweetly solemn thought Comes to me oft and oft: 'Tis nearer my home today Than ever before!

Nearer the bound of life, Where we lay our burdens down; Nearer leaving the cross, Nearer gaining the crown.

But the waves of that silent sea Roll dark before my sight, And brightly the other side Break on a shore of light.

O, if my mortal feet Have almost gained the brink, If to the far shore home Even today than I think,

Father, perfect my trust, Let my spirit feel in death That her feet are firmly set On the Rock of a living faith.

JUDITH REID; A Plain Story of a Plain Woman.

[Entered, according to the Act of Congress, in the year 1871, by Mrs. A. J. Dunaway, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress at Washington, D. C.] CHAPTER XXI.

July swung open her golden gates and ushered in the glorious days that annually come and go at her bidding. The early morning was delightfully cool.

I made preparations for a morning visit to my childhood's home, resolved, after having once nerved myself for the ordeal, to search out and discover all its remaining landmarks.

Ordering a gentle horse, I rode out alone. The wagon road of long ago, over which I had journeyed with my father on that never-to-be-forgotten day which awoke my slumbering ambition for inventing and securing patent rights, was no longer open to the traveling public;

but by dint of opening gates and letting down bars I managed to follow a dim orrill path across waving corn fields, where often the luxuriant growth would envelope myself and steed until I could take no note of the surroundings.

I had left home in a hurried, fretful mood, which did not auger very favorably for ennobling impressions, but the glorious morning, the sympathy of my horse and the memory of olden times combined to soothe me.

All at once I seemed to grow in perfect harmony with nature. A hazy, mellow light fell in softened radiance upon the fluttering corn. Suddenly my horse stood still. The light seemed to acquire form and substance, and a human face and form, so well remembered that I recognized the person instantly, beamed out clearly and distinctly before me in the path.

Instantly, as usual, the vision vanished; but I would close my eyes and ride letively on, and ever and anon the same outlines of form and feature would gather shape before me in the darkness. What could all this mean?

I grew perfectly tranquil, peaceful, happy. The melody of that sweet and solemn promise, "I'll explain," which for so many years had softened the bitter trials which I all along had borne, charmed peans of hope to my waiting soul.

Quickening my horse's pace, I at length emerged from the dense fields of corn and reached an open pasture, where every rock laid bare to me the smiling features of some never-to-be-forgotten friend.

I mused and pondered much upon the weary life of my pale and unobtrusive mother. So near to my heart did she seem that I could not realize that for, oh, so many years! she had been done with life's vicissitudes. And as I thought of her life of constant self-sacrifice, unappreciation and stolid resignation to silent despair, my heart went out to her in ardent longings that could not be repressed.

Presently a sharp angle of the road brought me to the old school house, where my vivid recollection of the days of my youth became doubly intensified. The log building was a dilapidated ruin. A motherly cow with her good-natured calf stood in the shadow of the shapless pile, chewing the end of sweet content, and lazily twitching off the flies. A little flock of sheep scampered out of the ruin at my too near approach, awakening in my soul the distant echoes of long gone decades. In one dark corner lay a matronly swine, grunting contentedly over the vigorous and evidently successful efforts of about a dozen pink-eared juveniles to replenish their eager appetites with the mother's abundant lactical supply. Chickens cackled in the loft, and on a decaying rafter a fine, lortly Shanghai sat, who greeted me with an exultant crow. Skeletons of what had once been windows hung their bony bars across a few dilapidated openings. Litter, dust and mire covered the decaying floor and broken benches.

matic melodies upon the listening air. The mother swine arose from her recumbent position in the distant corner, leaving her family curled snugly down within the pile of straw to sleep. Old Shanghai crowded again from the ruder rafter overhead, awakening reverberating echoes that seemed to congeal my blood. Everything I saw began to swing in mazy circles around me. My knees smote each other, and again, as in the olden time, I could have envied Belshazzar.

Gradually I lost all consciousness. A darkness that could be felt enveloped me, and I sunk down in utter forgetfulness.

When I awoke to consciousness the afternoon was far advanced. My poor, impatient horse was restlessly stamping the ground, and biting at his lunge at the twigs and leaves of the hickory sapling to which he had been hitched. The cow and calf and pigs were gone, and the old building, all blank and desolate, looked, as in sober truth it was, the skeleton of days long departed.

The melody of olden memories chanted a solemn requiem, and I passed out of the time-hallowed ruin to the measured cadence of my own lone footsteps, feeling, oh! so sad and desolate, that words of mine utterly fail to give those feelings expression.

My good steed neighed a gentle recognition, and mechanically mounted him and rode on, in the direction of the old homestead, feeling the while that my day and generation in this world had been long out-lived.

My ideas of locality became somewhat disturbed, and spying a wood-chopper at a little distance from the bridle path, I rode up and accosted him.

"Sir, can you tell me the way to the falls?" "What falls, yer ladyship?" "The falls of the creek, sir."

"Precious little fall there is there now, ma'am. The back water from the mill dam's made the whole thing a pretty high dead level. Any business at the mill?"

Here was a change of which the bare possibility had not until that moment occurred to me.

I had expected to find other matters changed, but the dear, old waterfall, the music of the grand old trees and melody of singing birds, I looked and longed and hoped to find as I had left them.

"Tell me how to reach the mill," I said at length, not heeding the fellow's question.

"Leave that board fence on yer left and you orchard on yer right, take down the broad lane and go straight ahead, ma'am."

The honest yeoman's directions were followed. Passing through a lane of over one mile in length I came out at last into an open clearing, where stumps were as thick as "hills" in a corn field. Instead of the fine groves of sugar maples with the scars of many tappings upon their scaly sides, with "sugar wags" around in ease and carelessness; instead of the silken foliage of the grand old forest and the sweet, half-scented music of the spheres, nothing was there but the bare stumps and roots of departed forest grandeur.

"Will the realization of all my life-long dreams prove as unsatisfactory as this?" I asked aloud.

My voice seemed cracked, constrained and harsh.

"Judith Reid, can this be you?" I pinched myself and exclaimed.

Once more the memory of that sweet and solemn promise, "I'll explain," attended itself to melody; and that blissful memory had power sufficient to lure me on, or I should have turned about and hid me to the city.

The afternoon sun beamed down in blustering rays upon my unprotected head, inducing a racking pain in my temples.

breakfast, we should like to stop with you. "Are you the woman that lived up to Dr. Armstrong's?"

"I did live at the Doctor's for a season, Why?" "Because, if you're that Smith, you're a good-for-nothing hussy. You had a good husband once, and you ruined him! And then you threw your arms 'round Dr. Armstrong and would have ruined him, but, luckily, his wife got home in time to save him. No, madam! I've no use for you or any of your kind. I've heard of you women's rights women. You're a free love set, the whole 'bilities' of you."

I was really amused at the simpleton's tirade.

"Are you certain, my good woman, that these things are so?" "Didn't Henry Jones, your own brother-in-law, tell me you weren't a decent woman?"

"That's overblowing proof, my dear madam, and I've no more to say. But, perhaps, if you won't feed me, you'll allow my poor horse to be fed. He isn't a woman's rights horse."

A boy was called, who led my horse away to the barn, while I, more dead than alive, proceeded to hunt for the next nearest house, in search of food and shelter from the burning sun.

Not far behind the great, ungainly, workmen's boarding house with its one ignorant mistress, wife and servant, lay our dear old home, nestled among an over-crowd of bushes and vines, a perfect oasis of green in this desolated desert.

I was surprised to see the place so well preserved. The odor of fresh whitewash was upon the walls. A little child sat playing with some empty cotton-wool upon the naked floor, and a huge cat lay curled up at its feet asleep. The identical "old hall clock" stood as a welcome sentinel in the same old corner where it had stood when I was born. But it was still in its joints from excess of age, and evidently was kept for ornament instead of use, as a wee bit of a brass time-piece ticked away at the minutes, and seemed to pronounce in my ears the one sweet word of "welcome," which it continued to repeat until a pleasant-faced young woman entered.

"I have come to request you to furnish me with dinner," said I, tremulously; for, to tell the truth, I had become very doubtful as to whether a "woman's rights woman" could get a meal in that locality for love or money.

"Certainly," was the pleasant response. "Our dinner for the day has been over for several hours, but we have supper at six. Won't you have a seat?" "Thank you, but I prefer to lie down and rest. I am very much fatigued."

The obliging hostess led me to my own, dear, little bedroom. A snow-white bed and ample pillows invited me to repose. I bathed my burning face and stretched myself upon the couch. The roof-vine with its vigorous growth over-shadowed the little window. A tiny looking-glass reflected my fevered face, and, but for the fact that age had changed me vastly for the better, as well as that my clothes were modern and ample, I could easily have imagined myself the Judith Reid of long ago.

I closed my eyes, but could not sleep. Contending emotions overmastered me, and I lay mute and still with my hand tightly clasped over my burning forehead and aching eyes. I listened long and eagerly for the old-time "tick, tick, tick-pick, pull, pick-nobody loves me, and I'm sick-tick, tick, tick," but the measured words came not, and in their place I heard the gleesome little clock chime out the ringing jingle that proclaimed the hour of noon. The pendulum caught up the glad refrain and finished with the one word "welcome," which it repeated till my soul gathered courage, resignation and hope.

Again a mellow light encompassed me, and again a well-remembered face defined itself upon my canvas. "Strange, indeed," said I, in soliloquy, "that my brain beholds this strange apparition when my eyes are closed. I cannot understand it."

After a while I heard the voice of a man, hearty, vigorous and pleasant, who was expressing the crowing baby, whose delight was evidently as great as his own.

"Hush! dear," was the mother's warning. "A lady from the city is here. She was very tired and asked permission to lie down, and I sent her to the east bed room. Let her sleep."

"Who is she?" in a low tone. "I didn't ask her name, for I thought it was none of my business; but I saw Mrs. Stone at the boarding house, and she says she's nothing more nor less than Judith Reid!"

"Well, well; is it possible? I wouldn't have missed this opportunity for a kingdom!" "Mrs. Stone says she wouldn't have her around the house. She gave her an awful name, but for some unaccountable reason my heart warmed towards her. She has glorious eyes, and her dress is simple and elegant."

"Let your women alone for seeing the like of that," said the husband, pleasantly. Then followed a long consultation, in which I could occasionally catch a word, but of the general drift of which I could form no idea.

(To be continued.)

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